

The moral and ethical dimensions of language teaching

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Much has been written about teacher thinking and knowledge that underpin teacher behaviour in the classroom. Until the 1990s considerably fewer writers considered the moral and ethical dimension of teaching. This article reports on a study that analysed six Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teachers' reports about their teaching. Under the broad category of caring as a moral dimension of teaching, three major moral/ethical concerns were identified: (1) the concern that everyone has a worth, (2) the concern that students should not hurt each other's feelings, and (3) the concern that students should learn to tolerate differences. These concerns enveloped the teachers' stated goals of LOTE teaching and framed their behaviours in the classroom. While the results can only be related to these six LOTE teachers, this study, nevertheless, raises an interesting question of whether teachers of other subjects manifest the moral dimension of their teaching in ways different from those reported here.

Introduction

Teaching is a complex activity that has interwoven layers of complexities, emanating from the teachers themselves, and compounded by each student, each classroom, each school, each school district and each community. The knowledge base of teachers therefore includes facets of all these complexities, though all such knowledge may not be explicit (Schon, 1983). Knowledge bases discussed by Shulman (1987a) have included those related to subject content, general pedagogy, pedagogical content knowledge contexts and educational ends. Other influences on teacher functioning have also been explored. Amongst these have been the role of teachers' personal biographies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986), teachers' decision making (Shavelson & Stern, 1981), principles and rules by which they function in classrooms (Elbaz, 1983), aims and goals with which teachers operate (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996; Marland & Osborne, 1990), and beliefs that permeate their teaching (Calderhead, 1996; Pajares, 1992). Borg (2003, p. 81), in writing for a second language audience, has discussed these various sources of knowledge and beliefs—'the unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think'—as 'teacher cognition', influenced by four sources: schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors and classroom practice.

In the discussion of the bases for teacher action in classrooms by the writers mentioned above and others, considerably less emphasis has been paid to one

dimension of beliefs that also influences teacher actions in classrooms: the moral or ethical dimension. For example, Calderhead (1996) discusses teacher beliefs about learners and learning, about subject, about learning to teach, about self and the teaching role and various types of knowledge bases but does not mention the moral element. It seems to be, as Fenstermacher (1990) pointed out, either ignored or forgotten. There is a moral element to our behaviours in our work lives, more in some and rather less in others. The work of teachers, doctors and ministers of religion, for example, may make the moral dimension of their work more salient and would provide some explanation for the types of behaviour that people in these three professions exhibit. To better understand teacher behaviours in the classroom one therefore needs to take into account their moral dimension also, not only the cognitive. It is the argument of this article that the moral/ethical dimension needs to be foregrounded, just as various types of knowledge are in discussions about teachers and their professional behaviour, so that we can develop a fuller understanding of the events that occur in classrooms.

Review of literature

A number of writers have argued for the importance of the moral dimension of teaching. Tom (1984) made the case that teaching was a profoundly moral activity. In a similar vein, in an article responding to Shulman (1987a), Sockett (1987) argued that the occupation of teaching was essentially a moral endeavour and therefore could be discussed in language drawn from the moral realm. This would suggest that a more sociomoral framework should inform thinking about and direct research on teachers and teaching. Such a framework, in which teacher professionalism would be rooted, would contain the 'following four elements: (1) an ideal of service, (2) an epistemology of practice, (3) the professional community, and (4) a code of ethics' (Sockett, 1987, p. 217). In his reply to Sockett (1987), Shulman (1987b) acknowledges that there is a moral dimension to teaching that should be included, but he rejects any suggestion that this should be seen as the quintessential feature. Whether it is an essential feature, a prominent feature, or a feature that should be acknowledged more than it has been previously, the moral dimension of teaching had engaged the attention of only a very few researchers in the 1990s (e.g., Higgins, 1995; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Johnston, Juhász, Marken, & Ruiz, 1998). One reason for this might be the problematic nature of the definition of the moral dimension, not the least of which arises out of the fact that one person's morality (at one level) can be another person's prejudice.

Sockett (1993), in an attempt to explicate the moral dimension of teaching, discusses it in terms of a series of virtues. Acknowledging difficulties of definitions in the moral realm, he defines virtue as 'sustainable moral quality of individual human character that is learned' (p. 90) and that clearly entails some form of desirable ends which are generally acknowledged in a society. This raises an interesting question: whether some elements of these virtues might not vary from one society to another, and indeed, within one society itself.

Sockett claims that 'five major virtues [morally conceived] are central to an understanding of the practice of teaching'. They are honesty (being truthful,

unbiased), courage (as in courage to pursue long-term, morally-desirable goals), care, fairness (as in distribution of time to students as well as in discipline), and practical wisdom (born of reflectiveness and good judgement, and interwoven with the first four virtues). It is perhaps care that might be most easily observed in classroom for, according to Sockett (1993), it manifests itself as 'care for each individual', it involves 'affection, regard and feeling' and can be seen as acting 'in loco parentis' (p. 77-88). Sockett's approach to the moral dimension of teacher behaviour is broad and all encompassing and elements of it would be applicable to many human endeavours, for example, in medicine.

A more typologically driven approach to the moral dimension to teaching is taken by Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen (1993). In their study of moral dimensions in school contexts, they divide their categories of moral activities into two groups: 'moral instruction' (e.g., as part of curriculum on, say, slavery, or as visual displays in classrooms that convey moral content) and 'moral practice' (e.g., as both teachers and students speaking the truth in classroom, and as teachers not deliberately misleading students). The typology suggested by Jackson et al. is not without some difficulties. While one could say that a classroom rule such as 'Be kind to one another' falls under the moral realm, rules such as 'wipe your feet before coming into the classroom' or 'don't go down the up-stairs' do not appear to be of the same moral order.

Hansen (1999), in claiming for a greater acknowledgement of the moral dimension of teaching, intertwines this dimension with the intellectual dimension, arguing that at the heart of teaching is a concern for both intellectual and moral development. Teachers need therefore to be both intellectually and morally attentive to their students and to be aware of what their students are becoming (in the sense of developing) in both domains.

Conceptualising the moral element of teaching so that it aids in our understanding of ways that teachers act in classrooms has been difficult for a number of reasons, not the least of which has been the difficulty of finding a framework and language that will not only help to us to understand this facet of teaching and learning in classroom but also help us develop our understanding of it further (Elbaz, 1992).

To avoid some of the difficulties in delineating more precisely the moral dimension of teacher action, some writers have opted to discuss the teacher's role in terms of 'caring', a term that has very positive connotations (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Hargreaves (1995, p. 81) has argued for its importance in teaching and has claimed that '[c]are is at the heart of the emotional and moral working life of many teachers. Reform efforts which do not recognise the centrality of care, fundamentally threaten or demean the emotional and moral character of teaching'. Van Manen (2000) has argued that the discourse surrounding education has become too rationalistic, or technicist, or too focussed on easily assessable outcomes. He sees 'caring' as an antidote to this technicist approach to education, and sees it in terms of the types of caring exhibited by good parents, a point also made by Whitcombe (2002).

So far the discussion has been on insights developed in the field of general education. Discussions in the field of second language teaching have focused on the

moral dimension of teaching in terms of political and social ramifications of the hegemonic influence of the English language (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). One of the few studies that has looked at the moral dimension of language teacher behaviour investigated the behaviours of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers teaching in a large midwestern university in the United States (Johnston et al., 1998). The units of analysis used in the study were based upon the three categories that were collectively called 'moral practice' in Jackson et al. (1993): (a) classroom rules and regulations, (b) morality of curricular substructure (speaking truth, as mentioned above), and (c) expressive morality within classroom (e.g., how students learn to read teachers and the underlying meanings of teachers' utterances). As in this article, Johnston et al. argue that a 'full understanding of the activity of teaching ... needs to acknowledge and explore its inherently moral nature' (p. 181). An example of rules and regulations provided in the Johnston et al. study refers to the development of a form of trust—what I would call a form of social contract—between the teacher and students regarding norms of behaviour in the class. The second category, curricular substructure, relates to shared understandings in the class, though as the Johnstone et al. example shows, shared understandings might be more difficult to achieve in an ESL class where students are from quite different cultural backgrounds from those of their teachers. The third category, expressive morality, deals with subtle, often implicit, moral meanings in the classroom. In a multicultural classroom the possibilities of misunderstanding are greater and it seems that both teachers and students have to make accommodations if shared moral meanings are to be evident in the interactions in the classroom.

In this article I wish to discuss the moral dimension of teaching related to the development of more ethical and compassionate members of a society. This goal is underpinned by caring as conceived by Noddings (1984; 1992), Sockett (1993) and Van Manen (2000). The data reported below show care manifesting itself in the teachers' orientation to the development of students' moral values in the area of personal relationships. By choosing to focus on the moral dimensions of personal interactions and the development of students as more ethical and compassionate members of the society, the article necessarily overlooks many other teaching behaviours that would fall under the rubric of 'moral dimension'. This choice has also been driven by what appears to be a domain in which the language teachers in this study claim to be particularly active—though the teachers themselves have not used these terms as descriptors of their behaviour or acknowledged overtly the moral dimension of their classroom behaviour.

The data themselves were gathered as part of larger project that looked at LOTE teachers' personal practical theories of teaching a foreign language. It did not single out the moral dimension for specific study though it was evident in some aspects of teachers' practical theories (e.g., theoretical assumptions, social system, and principles of teacher reaction). Analyses of the data, however, foregrounded certain reported beliefs that are best described as part of the moral dimension of teaching. The next section provides a brief background to the larger study, details of which are in Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, and Son (2004, 2005).

The study

Participants

Six LOTE teachers in regional Queensland, Australia volunteered to participate in this study. Two were teaching a LOTE at primary (elementary) level, while the other four were teaching at secondary (high school) level. The teachers ranged in age from early 30s to late 50s and, as might be expected, exhibited a wide range of teaching experience, from 3 to 30 years. The LOTEs taught by these teachers covered Chinese, German, Indonesian and Japanese, hence covering both script and non-script languages.

Data collection

Data were collected through two semi-structured interviews, and two video-stimulated recall exercises (other methods of data collection also used are not relevant to this article). The interview questions themselves were generated from the Joyce and Weil (1994) framework for describing teaching methods. The overall framework comprised the following elements (the numbers in brackets represent the number of items in each element):

1. goal focus (principal goals) (3)
2. theoretical assumptions (beliefs and principles underlying approach) (15)
3. strategies (methods used with a Communicative Language Teaching approach) (7)
4. social system
 - teacher roles (7)
 - student roles (5)
 - teacher-student relationships (4)
 - normal student behaviours (6)
5. support system
 - teaching skills (4)
 - teacher attributes (7)
 - special resources (4)
6. principles of teacher reaction (8)
7. instructional and nurturant effects
 - instructional (3)
 - nurturant (2)
8. 'grand' other

The data themselves were categorised using the elements in the framework and all those data that did not fit into the preconceived elements were put into an 'other' category, one for each element and a 'grand other' category for units that could not be coded or classified at all. These preconceived categories related to communicative approaches to second language teaching. So, for example, one of the items under the category of goal focus was 'to develop students' communicative competence in L2'. An item under theoretical assumptions was 'students should be actively involved in the construction of meaning'. An item under strategies was 'role-plays', while under teacher roles was 'facilitator of communication processes' and so forth for each element. So if a teacher reported that she prepared

the dialogues for students in their role-play, this was coded as 'other' under 'teacher roles' because this teacher action was not regarded as communicative language teaching. Only about 36% of the data fell into the preconceived categories, with the majority of the teacher data falling into various 'other' categories. While it can be argued that some of the elements in the Joyce and Weil framework have or can have a moral dimension, the data discussed in this article do not come from those elements. Instead, they come from categories labelled as 'other' under each of the major categories of the framework.

Elements of teachers' moral concerns

Before discussing the data related to the moral dimension of teachers and teaching it has to be pointed out that the substance of teachers' practical theories as outlined by teachers themselves is always necessarily incomplete because some aspects of teaching of experienced teachers can become so routine that they are no longer available for articulation (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Extensive classroom observation and more protracted conversations with teachers might have revealed other elements of moral behaviour also. In an interview, however, it is generally expected that what will be mentioned by interviewees are those matters that are in their consciousness and are prominent reference points for their daily activity of teaching. On the other hand, we can be confident about those comments coded for some moral content, because teachers had not been asked specifically about the moral dimension of their teaching in classroom, such direct questioning likely to produce socially acceptable responses.

The search for data was selective. Only material related to three categories of caring was sought, namely, (a) everyone has worth, (b) don't hurt the feelings of others, and (c) tolerance of differences. As mentioned earlier, other forms of caring are evident in the data, for example, differential feedback to students on the basis of teacher's perception about what would be more motivating for individual students. The data presented below, however, illustrate different (but limited) facets of the reported moral dimension of teaching of these teachers. They were not mentioned by all six teachers, but each teacher appeared to espouse one or more of the three elements identified. It should be noted that only these three categories of caring were chosen because they were considered to lay further along the continuum of caring, bordering into moral behaviour. The example above about differential feedback is a form of caring but it has more to do with cognitive state of the learner.

Everyone has worth This was manifested in the data of the six teachers in two ways: one, the creation of an atmosphere in classroom that can lead to the fulfilment of each student. Adele (all teacher names used in this article are pseudonyms) put it thus: 'Everyone should have a good self image' (Interview 1) and she tries to create this through a caring atmosphere:

I think, hopefully, they'd pick up first of all, would be a very caring atmosphere. That I'm genuinely interested in the students, as individuals, not as a class. That I somehow find time for those that need extra help, even if it means work in lunch-hours, things like that. (Adele, Interview 2).

The related aspect of this care for students is that they should feel comfortable, as Adele said: 'Well, I think it's essential so that everyone in the room feels comfortable. Nobody feels threatened.' But comfort does not mean no effort: 'the students know that it's a working atmosphere.' (Adele, Interview 2)

The following is a more extensive statement, from interviewee Bess, relating to this moral value:

I think one of my core values is everybody has worth. So, regardless of who you are, there is something about you that is worthy of respect. You deserve to be loved, accepted, and appreciated. . . . And I try really hard, because I believe in those values, to operate in my classroom in that way. So it doesn't matter if it's the naughtiest. Obviously it's easy to have those values if you've got a class of perfect people. But life's not like that. So, they're the values I try and operate on when I come into difficulty with students. That I know there is something good about this person. I may not yet have discovered it! But I do know that that exists. I don't come from the base 'everybody's bad and will learn to be good'. For me, 'everybody's good, and will learn to be bad'. So that's how I operate in my classroom, so I'm hoping that the boys all know that they have value in my eyes. And I want them to treat each other in the same way in my classroom. So that's probably the most basic value. (Bess, Interview 2).

Don't hurt the feelings of others The data show that some teachers are concerned about developing behaviours that will take into consideration feelings of peoples with whom they interact. Adele puts it directly as avoiding 'having our feelings hurt' (Interview 2), while Kate sees this quality developing through having a 'caring kind of atmosphere' (Interview 2). Kate's approach is more direct, probably because she is dealing with primary school children who are generally told about appropriate behaviours more directly, as is evident in the quote below:

I think it's important to feel safe . . . To feel secure. To feel confident . . . I want a warm sort of atmosphere. A caring kind of atmosphere. I'm always saying 'we don't put each other down. No put downs. No bullying.' (Kate, Interview 2)

An atmosphere of care for others and supporting each other is also evident in the story that Doreen tells about one of the two autistic boys in her German class.

[Name], when he finally, after two years of German, stood up and gave an oral presentation, which he'd always refused to, well, the kids nearly gave him a standing ovation. They clapped, and they clapped, and he went red, and he went all colours, but that was so spontaneous, I was really impressed. That they were able to appreciate the problems that he went through, to actually have the courage to stand up in front of the class, and [speak]. (Interview 2)

Tolerance of differences It seems to me almost axiomatic that foreign language teachers have alternative worldviews from those in which they have grown up because language and culture are so intricately intertwined. Having apprehended the richness that exists in the world and which is evident, especially to those who are not monolingual and monocultural, teachers would want to share this understanding of the world with their students. It is the development of tolerance in his students that Guy refers to when he says that he wants 'to make children a lot

kinder to your average holiday maker at the Gold Coast' (Interview 1). Guy reports that he does this in the following way:

Want them to look inwardly at their own culture and think 'well, that's just the way we do it.' Just like in Japan, that's the way they do it. Neither is any better than the other. It's just another way that it's done in the world. (Interview 2)

As Guy states earlier, however, this is not an exercise in simply pointing out the differences, but 'the fact that so many of the things are the same, comes in along the way' (Interview 1). Adele uses a somewhat different focus in her classroom in order to develop a sympathetic attitude towards others. She focuses on the similarities: 'why we are the same, why young Japanese boys and girls are so similar to our kids' (Interview 1).

By contrast, Gwen states that 'you appreciate a culture ... for its differences and not its similarities to your own' (Interview 2).

Bess wants

to instill a sense of respect of other people, and in my case, Japanese people, because maybe a lot of their values or preconceptions or assumptions, are because of lack of understanding, or lack of knowledge. So, they come in with lots of ideas, lots of attitudes, but, they're coming from a basis of not really knowing what the full picture is. (Interview 2)

Kate's goals can be discerned in her statement that 'they should be tolerant of people from other cultures, not just Indonesia, but to be more tolerant, and open and accepting of difference' (Interview 2).

The broad goal of each of the teachers seems to be to develop in their students a tolerance of 'otherness'. The particular ways they approach this in their own teaching seems to reflect the individual characteristics of these teachers. Guy wants his students to be aware that they do certain things in their culture that are done differently in other cultures, without, it seems, wanting to make any value judgements about the way things are done. Adele seems to take a more humanistic approach and tries to convey to her students that there is a common underlying humanity that is sometimes masked by the surface differences. Gwen, on the other hand, wants to develop an appreciation of the other culture through the differences. The other two teachers, Bess and Kate, do not provide any detail about ways they might go about developing tolerance of differences, though Bess does mention that she has an 'impact as a teacher, and that way ... my values ... are very important, because they communicate all the time in the classroom' (Interview 2).

Discussion

The data from the second language teachers involved in this study suggest that their teaching incorporates sociomoral goals. These are long-term goals that go beyond teaching a second language and its culture. There are certain values, or moral goals, that these teachers want to achieve through their teaching in the way that Hargreaves (1995), for example, has argued. Their caring occurs in the sense that Sockett (1993) has argued (involving affection, regard and feeling), but it seems to

go beyond that and borders on the realm of ethical behaviour. These teachers want their students to care for each other and by extension, care for people they meet or will meet in the future.

As almost a corollary to the caring dimension of these LOTE teachers is their attempt to inculcate in their students the understanding that one element of caring for people is not to hurt their feelings. This is a universal moral principle that can be summarised by the words found in all major religions: Do to others as you would have them do to you. Or, to use the words of one of the teachers: 'none of us like to have our feelings hurt, or be offended by anybody, and to be very aware of not doing that to anyone else as well' (Adele, Interview 2). Admittedly, this category of caring (as well as 'everyone has worth') may not be specific to foreign language teachers but may be manifested by teachers of other subjects also. For example, it is wholly possible that the category 'everyone has a worth' is strongly held by Special Education or Physical Education teachers, because teaching events in these areas, as in foreign language teaching, lend themselves to such manifestations on the part of the teacher.

It is sometimes easy to care for those people that we like, or know, or are similar to us. LOTE teachers try to instil tolerance into their students of things that are new and different. The teachers in this study are very much aware that experiences in regional Australia do not always expose children to non-Anglo-Australian experiences, or even people from different cultures within the Australian borders. They use cultural experiences offered by the LOTE, however vicarious they might be in many cases, to try to develop alternative perspectives on life and people so that tolerance, arising out of some understanding, might transmute into caring and an understanding that human beings have a worth, independent of class, creed or colour.

It would be interesting to explore further whether the particularities of the moral dimension of teacher action of these foreign language teachers arise out of the very nature of the subject they teach. Would science teachers, for example, try to instil into their students the moral concerns related to the wellbeing of the planet and the part each one can play in its care? The data from ESL teachers that Johnston et al. (1998) present certainly indicate that ESL teachers are involved in conveying particular values—some would argue, moral values, others might see them as cultural—about the equality of sexes. To what extent such values are moral or moral with a heavy overlay of culture is a moot point. It does, however, underscore the fact that the values that teachers themselves hold will be an amalgam of their own experiences of growing up and the particular cultural context in which they occur. Subsequent experiences may help teachers to become decentered and create a greater awareness of the culture-specific nature of some of the values they hold, and dare one say it, of morals also.

A question that arises is whether the phenomena discussed in this paper are particularised to ESL teachers only or to ESL teachers in certain contexts. Would, for example, the moral dimension of Science teachers be related to similar sociomoral concerns or would their moral concerns relate to elements like the environment and ecology? Social Science teachers have been judged by students to

be different from Science teachers on some dimensions (e.g., Science teachers explain well and keep control of class while Social Science teachers relate well) as Batten's (1993) study found. Perhaps, on the moral dimension, the science teachers may be found to be different also. This is a matter for further investigation.

Another area for further research is to follow a teacher longitudinally to document whether interview data, as in this study, is matched by teacher behaviour that shows a moral dimension, and ways in which the moral lesson is conveyed. Such classroom observations would enable us to compose a sharper picture of ways in which teachers' behaviour has a moral orientation.

One task of teacher educators, it could be argued, is to develop a framework that will help us to understand the importance of the role of moral beliefs amongst the other beliefs (and knowledge) that underpin teacher action in classroom. Equally important is the need to explore the ways in which students, from their perspective, perceive elements of moral teaching and what effect they think such classroom behaviour has upon them.

This paper has looked at only a few facets of teachers' reported thinking about the goals of their teaching. They are of interest because they foreground an aspect of teaching that can be remarkably salient for a teacher and can have a dramatic long-term effect on their students.

Keywords

teachers
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